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Cuba: Carter Fed 'Lies' on Role in Zaire

By Karen DeYoung
Washington Post Foreign Service

Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez said yesterday that President Carter's charges of Cuban involvement in the rebel invasion of Zaire were "absolutely false" and "based on impudently repeated lies."

Speaking before the special United Nations Conference on Disarmament, Rodriguez called Carter's foreign policy "often contradictory" and suggested he was under "divergent influences" within the U.S. government.

Rodriguez's comments were the first direct Cuban response to Carter's charges last week that Cuba "had known of the Katangan plans to invade" Zaire's Shaba province and that "Cubans have played a key role in training and equipping the Katangans who attacked."

While demonstrators outside chanted "Cubans out of Africa," Rodriguez reaffirmed to the U.N. delegates his government's earlier contention that "Cuba has not participated directly or indirectly in the events in Shaba; that not only were there no Cubans present in this action but that, furthermore, Cuba did not supply the arms for that purpose nor did it train those who attacked."

"Neither does Cuba have political ties with the organization which claimed responsibility for the said events," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez's statement reiterated what Cuban President Fidel Castro personally told the chief of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana last week. Castro called the meeting in an unprecedented break with normal diplomatic procedures to emphasize his denial.

The combination of direct Cuban denials in the face of repeated U.S. accusations of Cuban involvement in Zaire has raised doubts even in the United States as to where the truth lies. Last Friday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee asked the administration to produce proof of its charges, presumably in the form of CIA intelligence reports.

Rebels believed to be based in Angola attacked Shaba province, formerly Katanga, two weeks ago. They were forced to retreat by French Foreign Legion paratroopers, with the United States participating in an emergency airlift of Europeans from the area.

While Rodriguez yesterday accused Carter of foreign policy "vacillations" and "dangerous deviations to a language reminiscent to that of the Cold War," he repeatedly softened

direct attacks on the president, and said that Cuba could not be oblivious of [Carter's] declared resolve to abide by detente... as the basic guideline of his foreign policy."

In a veiled reference to Carter's advisers, Rodriguez charged that the "false news" about Cuba had been "cleverly manipulated by those who hold a monopoly over international information [and] have singled out our country and its actions of solidarity with the peoples of Africa as a threat to security."

In an ABC network interview with Barbara Walters broadcast last night, Rodriguez was more specific. Calling Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski an enemy "not only of Cuba, but of all the progressive people of the world," Rodriguez said he did not want to be "the guarantor of Mr. Brzezinski's honesty."

Describing his ideology as "anti-Soviet, anti-Communist, anti-Cuban," Rodriguez called on Brzezinski to "give the proof to the Senate" on Cuban involvement in Zaire, and said that Brzezinski was "for the sake of policy telling false things."

Brzezinski gave a far sharper edge to administration displeasure with events in Zaire in a televised interview Sunday when he accused both the Soviet Union and Cuba of complicity in the rebel action and warned of serious "consequences" in U.S.-Soviet detente.

"I don't doubt [Carter's] personal honesty," Rodriguez said, "but I am doubting the possibility he has to judge properly what is happening around the world."

In addition to his harsh criticism of U.S. action in the Zaire crisis, Rodriguez in his UN speech catalogued a series of U.S. policies, including supports of "racists" in southern Africa and "expansionists" in Israel that he said dim Cuban hopes for world peace.

Turning the tables on Carter, Rodriguez blamed "the United States and other Western powers" for "continued massacres" by invading South African troops in Angola.

Stating that "Cuba wants peace and works for it," Rodriguez told the U.S. delegates that troops "did not leave Cuba to promote conflicts; rather, they were called by the representatives" of African nations "to fight beside them to ensure their sovereignty and independence."